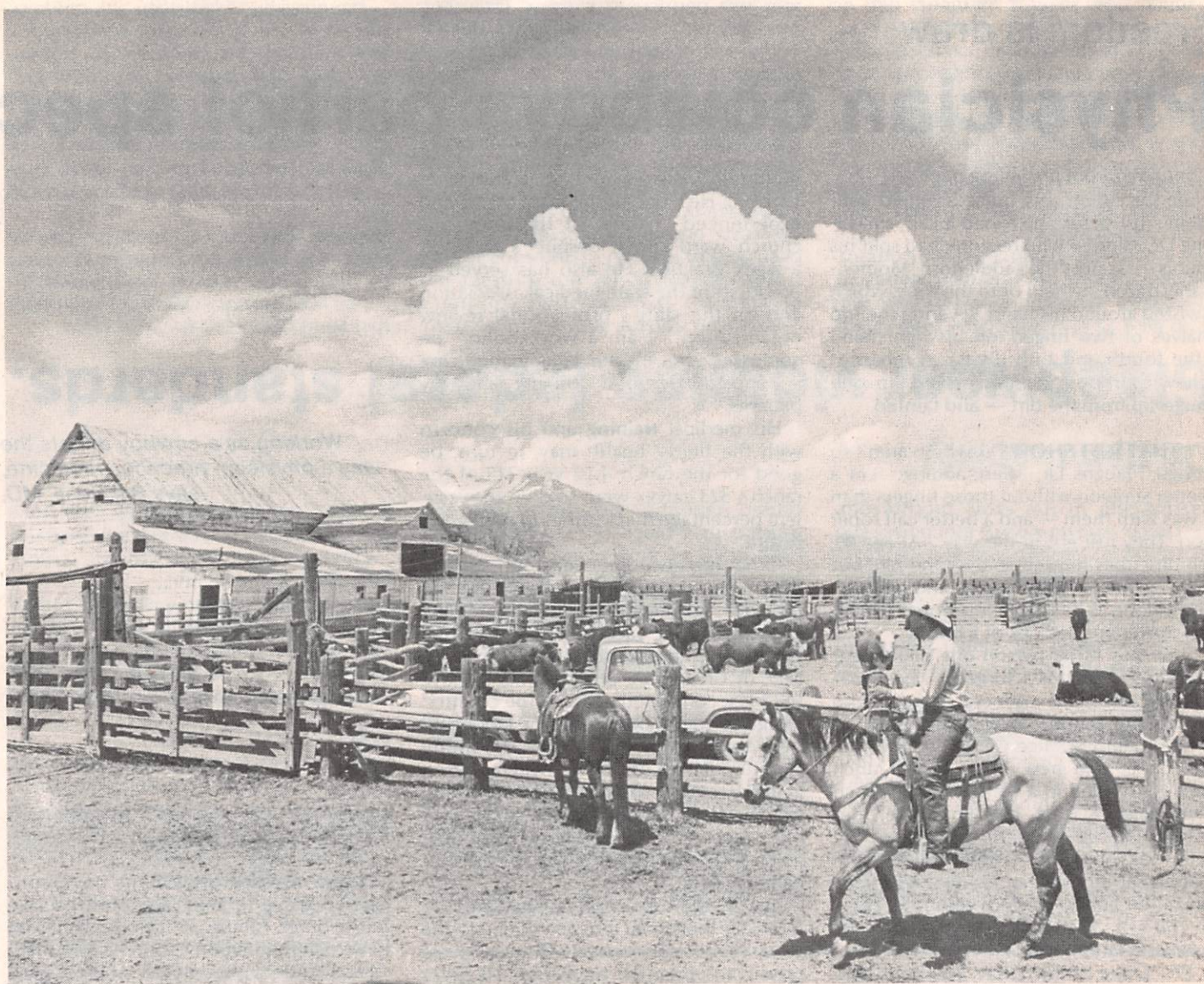


Some physicians, such as ophthalmologist Joseph Hatch, MD, are an unusual breed, combining their interest in medicine and their attraction to the land.



Photos: The Salt Lake Tribune

Medical cowboys at home on the range

"Mama, don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys," says Joseph Hatch, MD, as he herds his 350-head herd of cattle on the 5,000-acre range. Hatch, who is an ophthalmologist, wears cowboy hats and the leather boots. They're at home on the range. Hatch doesn't have a team or a coach. He gets

to be cowboys," wails Willie Nelson, and millions of country-western fans sing along with the refrain: "Make 'em be doctors or lawyers or such." Some mamas' children, though, have grown up to be both practicing physicians and cowboys. They're part of a special breed of individuals who are as home on the range as they are in the hospital.

"I feel more comfortable on the back of a horse than anywhere else," says Joseph Hatch, MD, an ophthalmologist from Salt Lake City and past president of the Utah Medical Assn., who regularly "works" a

Hillside Stake Ranch south of Salt Lake. "I'm never more relaxed than when I have a horse between my legs," echoes James Allen, MD, a family practitioner, rancher, and professional rodeo cowboy in Vernal, Utah. "The happiest moment of the day is when I get into my pickup after seeing 50 or so patients and head out for my spread on the Pecos River," says Edd Franks, MD, who describes himself as the best, worst, and only physician in Iraan, Texas.

There's more than a bit of John Wayne in these physician-cowboys, and the resemblance goes deeper than the Stetson

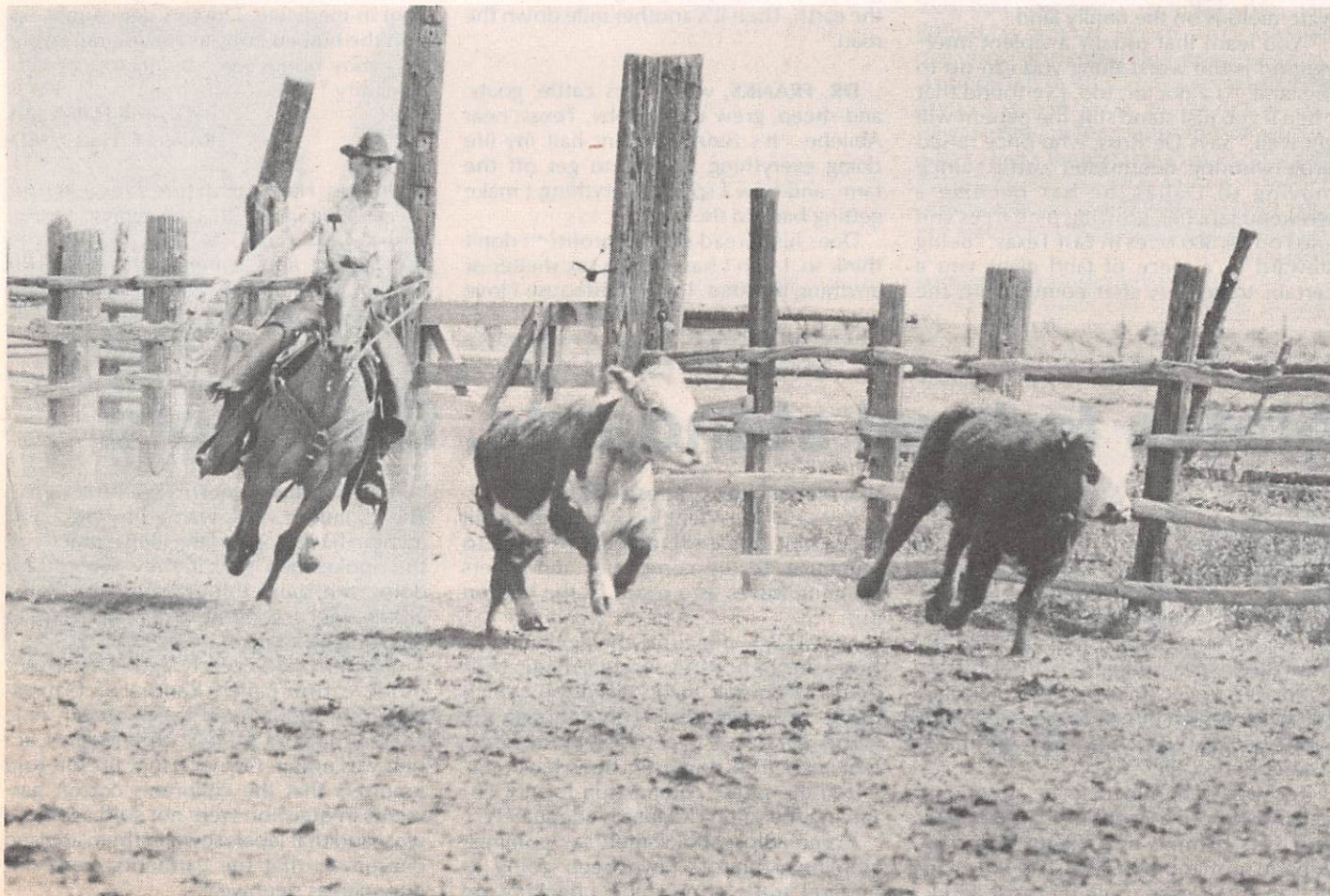
trucked to medicine and ranching for the same reasons: the freedom, the commitment to individual excellence, the sense of controlling their own destinies, the sheer physical challenge, and the desire to work with both head and hands.

Cowboys — both ranch and rodeo — share the same values as private practitioners, says Dr. Allen, who owns a 500-acre cattle ranch and who's been a professional calf and team roper for eight years. "Nobody 'owns' a cowboy. He may be a slave to his sport and to the road, but he is his own man. A rodeo cowboy

out there by himself and does his best. To me, that is Americana itself; that's the pioneer spirit that built this country. Doctors have the same spirit: They're dedicated to their profession and their art, and they meet challenges with fierce independence," he says.

Dr. Allen has the scars to prove his own fierce competitiveness. He has broken more than 30 bones, dislocated both shoulders, fractured his spine and collarbone, and suffered so many minor injuries that he has stopped counting. In his worst

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Dr. Hatch 'works' a herd of cattle near Salt Lake City. 'I feel more comfortable on the back of a horse than anywhere else,' he says.